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Pusat Kajian Bali dan Pusat Unggulan Pariwisata  
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# How Balinese Argue

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## Abstract

The Imaginary of Bali as paradise stands in stark contrast to what is actually going on. To understand the split requires examining who is authorized to represent Bali as what under what conditions. The issue concerns the nature of argument – whether argumentation and disagreement – and how it disarticulates and marginalize alternatives. The preferred, hegemonic style of argument in Bali is monologue, favoured by those in power, which effectively anticipates and prevents contradiction. By contrast, dialogue is open, democratic and widespread in daily life, but often passes relatively unnoticed. Whereas dialogue enables discussion and problem-solving, monologue re-asserts ideology in the face of uncomfortable actualities. In Bali, the form ideology takes centres on fantasies about an imaginary ‘age-old culture’. The drawbacks are evident in how claims over the cultural antiquity of *Tri Hita Karana* disguise its grave shortcomings in practice.

**Keywords:** *culture, argument, monologue, dialogue, ideology*

## Abstrak

### Bagaimana Orang Bali Berargumentasi

Khayalan Bali sebagai surga sangat kontras dengan apa yang sebenarnya terjadi. Untuk memahami perpecahan ini perlu kajian siapa yang berwenang menggambarkan Bali seperti apa dalam kondisi apa. Masalah ini menyangkut sifat argumen - apakah argumentasi dan ketidaksepakatan - dan bagaimana argumen itu mendisartikulasikan dan memarginalkan alternatif. Gaya argumen hegemonik yang

disukai di Bali adalah monolog, disukai oleh mereka yang berkuasa, yang secara efektif mengantisipasi dan mencegah kontradiksi. Sebaliknya, dialog bersifat terbuka, demokratis, dan tersebar luas dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, tetapi sering kali tidak disadari. Sedangkan dialog memungkinkan diskusi dan penyelesaian masalah, monolog menegaskan kembali ideologi dalam menghadapi aktualitas yang tidak nyaman. Di Bali, bentuk ideologi berpusat pada fantasi tentang ‘budaya kuno’ imajiner. Kekurangannya terlihat dari bagaimana klaim atas kekunoan budaya *Tri Hita Karana* menyamakan kekurangannya dalam praktik.

**Kata Kunci:** kebudayaan, argumen, monolog, dialog, ideologi

## Introduction

There are two Balis – and they have little in common. The first Bali is an earthly paradise, a living cultural museum, a land of smiling people where almost everyone is an artist. They are heirs to a wonderfully rich tradition of music, dance, theatre, sculpture, painting and literature expressed in spectacular temple festivals and cremations, where even the perishable offerings are works of art. Their dynastic chronicles tell of magnificent rulers, under the guidance of Hindu high priests, celebrated in sumptuous theatre performances. The landscape is breath-taking from looming volcanoes to the dramatic coastline. In between, surrounding ancient villages, lies a sea of green – an intricate mosaic of stunningly beautiful irrigated rice terraces. Bali is the fortunate manifestation of ancient philosophical wisdom which balances Divinity, humanity and the natural environment. We may happily conclude that Bali’s culture is unique in the ‘harmonious relationship between the realms of the spirit, the human world and nature’ (UNESCO 2011: 1).

The second Bali is quite different. It has dirty, sprawling, polluted towns, with scant urban design, that coagulate along strip development jammed with traffic. It is hard to know you are not in Medan or Surabaya. As to art, most is found in the innumerable,

almost identical Art Shops, selling almost identical touristic bric-à-brac, that line the roads and block the views. Nightclubs, bars and beaches occupy most tourist time, not culture. Visitors who search for it rarely experience ancient tradition, because it was mostly invented in the twentieth century. The most common gamelan, *kebyar*, originated in North Bali in about 1915. Dance dates not from 2,500 years ago (Soedarsono 1968), but burgeoned to meet the growing tourist market after the Dutch conquest in 1908-10 (Hobart 2007; Moerdowo 1977). The florescence of painting styles began in 1927 when the royal family of Ubud invited Walter Spies to oversee art production for visitors. *Babad*, the so-called dynastic chronicles that detail Bali's long history, were almost all written in the twentieth-century. The glorious lineage of resplendent rulers is largely confined to literary and theatrical re-enactment, the Balinese élite having proved at least as venal and murderous as their counterparts elsewhere (Vickers 2012). The idea that 'the cultural tradition that shaped the landscape of Bali, since at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is the ancient philosophical concept of *Tri Hita Karana*' (UNESCO 2011: 5) turns out to be plain fantasy. The term was coined by a military officer in 1966 as part of integrating Balinese culture with state ideology, Pancasila. As for the beautiful sea of ricefields, these are littered with hotels and homestays, private villas built at random, with shops and the accompanying detritus of modern living. You can drive for fifty kilometres from the capital without seeing the fabled rice lands hidden behind continuous commercial development and billboards. What of the traditional concepts of balance (*keseimbangan*) and harmony (*kerukunan*)? Neither turns out to be Balinese. The former is Indonesian; the latter Arabic. Rather than traditional Balinese concepts, we are offered an anachronistic and anatomic *gado-gado* of New Order ideology (Fox 2011:290). If so little unites these two Balis, what is going on?



Photo 1. 'Bali's famous rice fields, now hidden behind strip development'

### On Representation and Articulation

It is helpful to start by asking what sort of knowledge is involved and how is it promulgated. Treating Balinese as heirs to some ancient unchanging tradition presumes they are passive pawns imprisoned by a reified Culture as opposed to imaginative, creative, critical part-agents, if not under conditions of their own choosing. Representations, like those in my opening paragraph, do not exist as free-floating timeless truths, but as claims made under specific conditions. So, who represented what *as* what to whom on what occasion for what purposes? Fairly obviously broad terms like tradition, history, culture and so on cannot be applied with much precision to millions of people over centuries. Humans are too diverse, inventive, plain ornery and often inscrutable in their daily lives to conform conveniently to sweeping generalities. So, who claims the right to enunciate on their behalf? In other words, what are the circumstances under which an extraordinary complicated and partly unknowable actuality comes to be articulated? In so doing, what is disarticulated and who silenced?

What then do we know with any reliability? Vickers' review of historical sources (2012) has dismissed many myths, Western and Balinese. Picard has examined how mass tourism has impacted on Balinese culture (1996). I have analyzed how the concept of Balinese culture became reified (2000). And Fox has shown how Indonesian mass media, like television, have changed how Balinese religion is articulated (2011). To date though we lack critical analysis of the class and political interests of the Indonesians or foreigners who do the enunciating. Rigorous inquiry into who represented what as what to whom, when and why has barely begun. Here Cultural Studies becomes relevant, because it aims to analyze the conditions under which articulations have been made, counter-articulations marginalized and whole categories of people disarticulated. Such a study upsets cosy clichés about the continuity, harmony and unity of Balinese society.

### **Looking Behind the Facade**

Balinese are so adept at theatrical performance that it is tempting not to ask what happens behind the scenes. As an antique dealer once explained: to evaluate, say, an old table, you do not look at its shiny exterior, but turn it upside-down to see how it was made. My point in challenging some prevailing platitudes about Bali is to encourage the reader to ask what they conceal, what we are not supposed to look at and why. Representations of culture do not arise spontaneously. They are the outcome of protracted argument, struggles between rival interests, conflicts between articulations and counter-articulations out of which one version, more or less contested, temporarily emerges, which we call 'hegemonic' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). A startling omission in scholarship on Bali is how little is written on how decisions are reached and about the lengthy meetings, discussions and arguments that attend almost anything that happens. These range from parliamentary to village assemblies, from the organization of cremations to routine temple festivals to domestic rites. Equally neglected are such questions as what to do when relatives fall ill, how to organize work including

rice cultivation, deciding on family expenditure and investment, putting on a theatre performance, let alone organizing the annual Arts Festival. Indeed, almost any activity involves extended discussion that absorbs as much time, attention, concern and even emotion as it is studiously ignored when it comes to talking about representations of Balinese society. To inquire into the practices that underwrite cultural products of whatever kind involves critical self-distance, hard work, patience, familiarity and trust with the people involved, a knowledge of context (and, for foreign researchers, language skills) that is singularly demanding. So, it is much easier and less contentious just to admire – and, these days, photograph or record – the finished product no matter what went into it.

By this slightly circuitous route, I have arrived at my main theme: the practices that make up the collective representations, structures and organization of Balinese society, how people set about deciding what to do, do it, disagree with what is being done, engage or disengage – in short, how things actually work. A couple of disclaimers are necessary. First, am I not really asking ‘how do Balinese think’? The answer is no. We do not know what people think (especially if you allow for the unconscious), just what they *say* they think. Second, evidently the topic is too vast and diffuse to be simply encompassed, not least because much is everyday – and the quotidian is notoriously difficult to comprehend (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 2005). There are, however, discursive procedures and regularities, in Foucault’s sense that govern who may speak and who not; what is appropriate in any circumstance to say; what is possible and what is not. Such potentialities and constraints constitute what I understand as ‘cultural’, not the sanitized, normalized, reified, commoditized version of Culture peddled widely in Bali.

### **Reason and Racism**

As discussion and argument in their myriad forms – debate, deliberation, display, disagreement, dispute, reasoning, persuading, pleading and so on – play such a significant role in everyday life, how come they seem to be so scrupulously sidelined in most accounts of

Bali? Quite apart from scholars being interested in other topics, there are rather dubious and effectively unmentionable epistemological grounds. With European colonial expansion, reports accumulated of how other peoples had quite different ways of thinking and reasoning, encapsulated in arguments about how non-Western peoples had ‘Primitive Mentalities’ (Frazer 1922, Lévy-Bruhl 1910) which justified colonial domination and exploitation. Despite sharp rebuttals, the idea that primitive thought still flourished in pre-modern societies resurfaces periodically in Western scholarship (e.g. Hallpike 1979).

Far from being the end of the matter, several distinguished Western philosophers and anthropologists had meanwhile picked up the whole question of whether non-Western peoples were rational (extended, amusingly, to include anyone who espoused religious beliefs), which kicked off the so-called ‘Rationality Debate’. The first compilation (Wilson 1970, entitled simply *Rationality*) indicated that Western philosophers were not uniformly lined up in favour of universal (i.e. European) criteria of rationality nor anthropologists against. Questions also arose about what exactly proponents of rationality (rationalists) meant by reason, what kinds of statements were at issue (collective representations or individual thinking), how much was contextual and whether coherence was not a feature specific to a given ‘way of life’ in Wittgenstein’s terms. The excitement generated was such that two of the original contributors, Hollis and Lukes, edited a sequel (1982) arguing the case for European criteria of reason against relativism, which led to a strong retort by other anthropologists and philosophers (Overing 1985). Although scholarly interest drifted towards other topics, what the debate highlighted was residual racism masquerading under the more palatable guise of ‘reason’.

Why, Indonesians might ask, does all this matter to us? The answer is that this century-long European argument shrouds in evasion and silence issues to do with argument in Indonesia. Inquiring critically into how Indonesians – in this instance, Balinese – argue is fraught with the risk of inferential racism. The drawback

of this proscription is that little attention is given to how, say, Balinese reproduce, argue about and change their social institutions. It is safer to admire the finished products and pronounce sweeping generalities as to what motivates them – whether grand religious festivals, spectacular dance and theatre performances or cultivating irrigating rice terraces – than it is to inquire into what is actually going on.



Photo 2. 'More visitors probably see Balinese dancers in shopping malls than live'

Avoiding critical inquiry is not only counter-productive for understanding the intricacies of Balinese society and culture, but quite unnecessary. A simple move undermines the hegemony of European criteria of rationality as the only game in town. It is to recognize that, formidable as they are, such canons of argument are themselves cultural. Their semblance of being universal and essential to correct reasoning is part of an epistemological imperialism that accompanies and legitimizes economic and political colonialism. That is not to propose that such criteria are not useful. In many kinds of inquiry, they are. For example, I am deploying them here. What has been sidelined however is inquiry into the circumstances under which differences in styles of cultural argument occur.

## What Does the English Word ‘Argument’ Connote?

Significantly there are neither indigenous Indonesian nor Balinese equivalents for most English, or other European, terms to do with argument, which derive from Greek, later Latin, usage (broadly *logos* and *argumentum* respectively). This is not chance. Quite apart from public deliberative discussion becoming central to decision-making in Greek city states, the ancient Greeks were notoriously combative.

The most distinctive feature of Greek public address in contrast to that of many other cultures is its eristic [disputatious] qualities... Differences are usually politely or indirectly stated. In Egypt, Palestine, India, and China there are injunctions to turn away wrath with a soft answer, or even to be silent; this was not the attitude of the Greeks... In all societies calm deliberation sometimes breaks down, but generally speaking, throughout the non-Western world, rhetoric has been used for purposes of agreement and conciliation, and emotionalism, except in the case of lamentation for the dead, is regarded as in poor taste. There is also often an accompanying disapproval of blatant flattery, though flattery of those in power easily develops in autocratic societies. The Greeks were contentious from the beginning, and acceptance and indulgence of open contention and rivalry has remained a characteristic of Western society except when suppressed by powerful authority of church or state (Kennedy 1998: 197-8, my parenthesis).

Differences between, say, Balinese and European styles of argument are then not mere matters of epistemological inclination, but are articulated with quite distinct kinds of social practices of hierarchy, authority and power.

A problem is that the English word ‘argument’ covers both logic reasoning (argumentation) and disagreement. While formally these appear different, in practice they overlap. In order to explore Balinese ways of reasoning, discussing and persuading others, if we are not to prejudice discussion, we need to work between two quite different discourses. To do justice to Balinese cultural styles, we must first appreciate not just what these are and how they work, but

also the kinds of judgements Balinese themselves make about such practices. However, to engage critically with the implications of Balinese practice, we require modes of interrogation and judgement that are distinct from the social practices under study, otherwise we risk a vicious circularity.

As a starting point against which to judge its adequacy or otherwise, I shall introduce a few terms, while noting their discursive pedigree. European senses of argument draw upon classical Greek rhetoric, which spans notions of argumentation and persuasion. Rhetoric was a method of organizing and criticizing almost any form of discourse: ‘Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion’. (Aristotle 2007: 37; parentheses in the original). At its heart lie three modes of persuasion: *ethos*, how trustworthy the speaker is; *logos*, the logical reasoning used; and *pathos*, the emotional effect created by a speaker or text upon spectators or readers. If one is judging past actions, rhetoric is judicial. If judging future action, it is deliberative (deciding what course of action is best). If spectators are not expected to act, then it is epideictic (about praise, blame etc.). There are two modes of persuasion: non-artistic, which relies on direct evidence (facts, witnesses etc.); and artistic or logical arguments, which may either be inductive or draw analogies or deductive from accepted premises (see Kennedy 2007: 1-23).

### Cultural Styles of Reasoning

Are such distinctions any use in understanding Balinese styles of discussion and argumentation? *Ethos* does raise questions about what makes a speaker – including, of course, *dalangs*, actors, painters and so on – trustworthy. However, is trust based solely on personal reputation? Or do factors like authority, caste status or public office play a role? Furthermore, being trusted is quite different from being listened to. In a hierarchical society like Bali, many speakers are received with every appearance of acquiescence, but without being trusted in the least. *Logos*, styles of reasoning, are as important as they are under-investigated. Indian formal logic, notably Nyāya (which

means ‘argument’), combine with local variants in Bali (Hobart 1985: 117-24). What different modes are – and were – appropriate, permitted and used in different settings from Brahmanical law courts to *banjar* assemblies remain unresearched. *Pathos*, the effect of utterances (and other modes of communicating), invites a consideration of culturally specific usage of figurative language and indirection. Skilled speakers and performers often use veiled (*makulit*) or sophisticated (*wayah*) circumlocutions, which pass the less reflective by. Two quite separate issues are often conflated. What kind of effect do speakers hope or expect to create? And how do audiences respond and engage with what is targeted at them? There is often scant relationship between what communicators imagine they are achieving and how it is actually received, let alone used and acted upon.

Are these distinctions any help in analyzing the epitome of rhetoric: persuasive speech? It demands a certain skill to induce acceptance in audiences who are often sceptical of the veracity, say, of revelations by the non-manifest (*niskala*) dead or divinities. Elsewhere I examine two instances: a séance with a spirit-medium (see Hobart 2015: 13-19) and inviting the god of a temple to name his chosen officiant (2016: 5-15). The medium in each case left the decision of whether they were trustworthy or not (*ethos*) to the petitioners to judge by the likely truthfulness of the utterances. While the former used various techniques to move her audience (*pathos*), the latter relied on *logos*, the laying out of the argument, including evidence of events to which the medium would have been most unlikely to have access.

What of other kinds of speech and action designed to be persuasive? Here the relatively egalitarian nature of Greek society contrasts with those arenas in Bali marked by stark hierarchy, such as dealings with gods and political overlords. In his review of Balinese high priests’ daily preparations, *Sūrya Sevana*, Hooykaas noted a range of practices that included invoking and assigning place to, asking forgiveness, expiating, exorcising, placating, praising, requesting good fortune, adoring, sending off (1966: 35-40). While

supplicants presumably strive to justify their worthiness, make a strong case and appeal to the feelings of their hoped-for benefactors, a fuller treatment of the modes of persuasion and coercion would be fascinating. Other arenas in Bali, such as *banjar* assemblies and other local corporate groups, are notionally egalitarian and argument and disagreement are – or were – common.

Does recourse to South Asian philosophical and rhetorical writings clarify forms of arguing and persuading? While elements of Nyāya reasoning occur, I do not know of Balinese treatises that deal explicitly, like the *Nyāyasūtras*, with techniques of debating or kinds of argumentation, such as ‘argument (*nyāya*), discussion (*vāda*), tenet (*siddhānta*), cavil (*vitaṇḍā*), sophistry (*jalpa*), quibble (*chala*), futile rejoinder (*jāti*), and ways of losing an argument (*nigrahasthāna*)’ (Potter 1977: 208). What is found is the Buddhist use of fables, parables and allegories. Given the extent to which, since the 1950s, Balinese have adopted Hindu ideas and formulae from India, they have singularly failed to include the epistemological thinking and practices that would make sense of them.

### Monologue and Dialogue

So far I have reviewed formal categories. What about the social context of argument and discussion? Here the differences between Bali and Europe, past or present, become clearer by introducing an analytical distinction between monologue and dialogue. Following Bakhtin and Vološinov, monologue does not mean, as in everyday English, a single person speaking uninterrupted, nor dialogue to mean compositionally expressed conversation, for example in a play or television broadcast.

Monologue is closed. It involves the appearance of open argument, but is deceptive because the conclusion is predetermined and anticipated from the start of the exposition. It sets out to persuade by excluding others from actively contributing. It suits autocracy wonderfully. Seemingly interminable monologue suited President Suharto’s style of governance so admirably that the actor Butèt Kartaredjasa became celebrated for mockingly mimicking

not just the style but, through it, the entire arbitrary and repressive vision of power and authority that it instantiated. Monologue renders audiences silent and, crucially, passive participants. It is therefore hardly surprising that Balinese political figures find this an ideal mode of public address. Just to give one example, consider the speech of the Governor of Bali, Ida Bagus Oka, to the opening of the International Bali Arts in 1996 (Hobart 2015: 30-31). While heavy on *ethos* and *pathos*, it lacked coherent reasoning or subject matter. It was not informative, but demonstrative: it showed who had status, authority and the ability to command an audience's presence – if not their attention. Monologue is remarkably pervasive and developed as a style of presentation and argument in Bali. In *Sendratari* an entire cast of actor-dancers is reduced to puppet-like mime while being voiced by a single *dalang*.

The antithetical possibility is dialogue, which should not be confused with two or more parties talking. Many ostensible dialogues are, in these terms, crypto-monologues, including Plato's later Socratic dialogues, which were monologized into catechism, 'a simple form for expounding already found, ready-made irrefutable truth'. A striking example of such false dialogue that has 'entered the service of the established, dogmatic worldviews of various philosophical schools and religious doctrines' (Bakhtin 1984: 110) was TVRI's *Mimbar Agama Hindu*. These were exercises in disseminating pre-formulated ideology by wise teachers explaining its relevance to actors playing 'ordinary people' (Fox 2011: 55-132), disseminated to an audience expected to be naïve, appreciative and passive. We are dealing with 'a monologically understood, objectified world, a world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness' (Bakhtin 1984: 9) of the kind exemplified in epic writing, as 'there is no place in the epic world for openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy. There are no loopholes in it through which we glimpse the future; it suffices unto itself, neither supposing any continuation nor requiring it' (Bakhtin 1981a: 16). The Balinese love of epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana takes on a new significance.

What distinguishes dialogue on this account is not a formal set of criteria based on the number of speakers. Rather it is about exercising freedom and choice. Dialogic communication (which, in principle, includes the non-verbal) treats life as open and unfinalized – allowing for contingency and indeterminacy. It consists of practices that explore openness in the face of monologic authority, which seeks to control and regulate the possibilities of communication.

Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons... The dialogic nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth (Bakhtin 1984: 291, emphases in the original).

Monologue fixes and freezes and so works to deny the possibilities opened up by 'representing *as*'. We are invited to admire the performance of unchallengeable authority.

Michel Picard gives an elegant example of the confrontation of two styles of argument between the high caste-based journal *Bali Adnjana*, the writings in 'which tend to be couched in rather ambiguous and allusive terms' by contrast with the low caste-dominated '*Surya Kanta*, whose positions are more easily comprehensible today, as they appear seemingly "rational" as well as more clear-cut and straightforward' (2015: 8). Using the present distinction, the high castes opted for monologic circumlocution, whereas the low castes aimed more at argument as Europeans might understand it. Picard, in noting cautiously that *Surya Kanta*'s style was seeming 'rational' in European terms, invites further research into the respective argumentative styles of both publications.

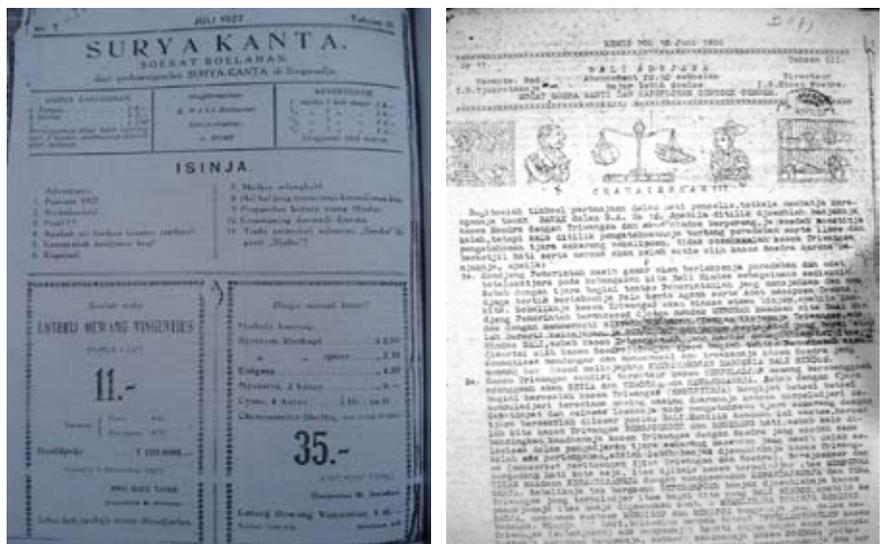


Photo 4. Bali Adnjana and Surya Kanta. (dua foto jadikan satu, pepetkan)

### Interpretation and Commentary

Whether something is monologic or dialogic does not, however, follow mechanically from an event. While communicators may go to great lengths to anticipate how they will be received – and often imagine that audiences accept this uncritically – such a commonsense perception is either simple-minded or disingenuous. Supposedly self-evident reality is the outcome of sophisticated exercises in articulation.

Any society or culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order*, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested... The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organised into *dominant or preferred meanings*... We say *dominant*, not ‘determined’, because it is always possible to order, classify, assign and decode an event within more than one ‘mapping’. But we say ‘dominant’ because there exists a pattern of ‘preferred readings’; and these both have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalised. The domains of ‘preferred meanings’ have the whole social order embedded in them

as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of ‘how things work for all practical purposes in this culture’, the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions (Hall 1980: 134, emphases in the original).

When the fatherly figures in *Mimbar Agama Hindu* explain how viewers should understand the world and behave, they are being offered ‘preferred readings’ in which the political and ideological order has been meticulously inscribed. Hall’s point however was that other ways exist of engaging with the dominant discourse. Readers or spectators may recognize what such dominant-hegemonic positions presuppose and choose to distance themselves by negotiating their own understandings or even rejecting hegemonic meanings root and branch (1980: 136-8). Hall’s work is important because it opened the floodgates to ethnographic studies of how audiences or readers actually engaged with and understood what they watched or read and, equally important, what they did subsequently. From my ethnographic experience during the 1990s, it was very rare for Balinese television viewers to accept the dominant-hegemonic reading. Instead they enjoyed interpreting programmes in ways that were often as unexpected as they would have horrified their dignified proponents.

If the great and good prefer monologue with its unanswerability, dialogue flourishes in everyday life. It also turns up in unexpected places. For example, in theatre, the servants’ use of different speech styles of colloquial Balinese in genres like *wayang kulit* is quite different from the fixed registers of *kawi* or elevated speech used by their aristocratic masters. Such living language is ‘centrifugal’, because it threatens the wholeness and stasis of formal rules, as the integrity of any cultural artifact is never ‘something given, but is always in essence posited – and at every moment . . . is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia’ (Bakhtin 1981b: 270). Second, depending on the circumstances of performance and the audience in question,

servants may discuss and criticize their masters and comment more or less directly on current social and political affairs. Needless to say, not all such commentaries are critical or dialogic: some serve to reinforce monologue.

Monologue is not necessarily a formal feature of speech independent of context or how it is understood by particular audiences. Not unlike Eastern Europe under the Soviet régime, it has often been unwise or dangerous for Indonesians to speak openly against their political masters. So indirect forms like allegory are useful. During the 1991 International Bali Arts Festival, a *Sendratari* performance, Pandawa Asrama, told of the Pandawa brothers' exile to the forest. The *dalang* Déwa Madé Sayang, voicing Begawan Byasa, advised them how to be good rulers and warned against different kinds of misrule. The villagers with whom I worked all treated his speech as an oblique indictment not only of President Suharto, but also the Governor of Bali and the then-head of the Institute of the Arts (Hobart 2015: 18-19). What was presented as a monologue was understood dialogically.

A skilled actor can explore the dialogic possibilities behind monologic government edicts and advice. Two examples make the point. In a *Prèmbon* performance, I Midep reduced the audience to helpless laughter with his rendition of the *liku* (mad princess). Speaking as if an Indonesian school teacher, he exhorted children:

Be industrious in helping your father with his work. Be industrious in helping your mother with her work.... But if your mother and father are working (away at it) together, don't help.

*Rajin-rajin membantu bapak bekerja, rajin-rajin membantu ibu bekerja.  
Kalau bapak dan ibu bekerja jangan dibantu.*

Then, explaining how the *liku* had won a royal husband, he explained it in terms of instructions to civil servants on being posted to different parts of Indonesia.

[First] Submit a letter of request!

Second: be prepared to submit to a trial period of three months.

Be prepared to take up any possible position.

Do you know what's 'be prepared to take up any possible position'?

Did you think it was anywhere in the archipelago?

'Be prepared to take up any possible position' means: 'on the right, on the left, on top or underneath'.

Mengajukan surat permohonan!

Dua: siap melakukan percobaan tiga bulan.

Siap ditempatkan di mana saja.

Tawang cai 'siap ditempatkan di mana saja'? Kadèn cai diseluruh Nusantara?

'Siap ditempatkan di mana saja.' Artiné: 'samping kanan, samping kiri, atas maupun bawah'.

An unending guerrilla war goes on between forces aiming to impose approved meanings and standard styles, exemplified in government pressure on public arts' bodies to toe the line, countered by actors and other intellectuals determined not to be drowned by monologue.

Much theatrical performance depends on audience and actors sharing an appreciation of the nuances of language, double meanings and social, political or topical references – in other words, the principles that organize how members of a social group understand one another. The theoretical linguist Basil Bernstein developed the implications of shared understandings by distinguishing two different modes of speech: restricted and elaborated social codes (1971). The former is economical, rich, ambiguous, highly allusive and can leave much unsaid, because the participants' knowledge and background are similar. It is an ideal mode of communication in what was – and partly remains – a tight-knit traditionally group-bounded society like Bali. The alternative, elaborated code, is effective and indeed necessary for explanation when you cannot assume your interlocutors know about the matter, if you wish to question what is taken for granted,

or spell out your reasoning to make a case, as in academic lectures or lawyers' delivery in lawcourts. Modern sectors in Bali therefore sometimes need recourse to elaborated codes to explicate the unfamiliar. These polar styles of communication are grounded in respective differences in the conventional social relations between participants. When Balinese are talking among themselves, they are likely to tend towards restricted code, which effectively eliminates developed argumentation, but permits constructive ambiguity. To adopt elaborated code in many situations may well appear arrogant, condescending and to set yourself apart.

### **Some Varieties of Dialogue**

Scholars often gloss over an important aspect of dialogue. Whereas monologue and pageantry are modes by which the powerful try to anticipate and prevent disagreement, dialogue flourishes in 'the most ordinary, standard, everyday utterance' (Bakhtin 1986: 109). It is the 'prose of everyday life' (Bakhtin 1979: 5). As Wittgenstein put it:

The aspect of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes)... And this means: we fail to be struck by what, when seen, is most striking and most powerful (1958: #129).

No wonder that scholars who look for the grand lineaments and the polished surfaces of Balinese culture fail to find argument, because it flourishes in everyday discourse, in ordinary acts and utterances that pass largely unnoticed. The everyday and ordinary are far harder to grasp and describe than carefully inscribed texts, tableaux and doctrinal formulae that we are invited to admire.

Passing largely under the radar there are, however, countless instances of dialogue every day among so-called 'ordinary' people. That is not to say that argument does not, more or less of necessity, take place behind the scenes. In writing about discourse. Foucault noted,

we may suspect that there is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced; and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech-acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again. We know them in our own cultural system: they are religious or juridical texts, but also those texts (curious ones, when we consider their status) which are called 'literary'; and to a certain extent, scientific texts (1981: 56-7).

What vanishes as soon as it is pronounced is *inter alia* what prevents society from becoming rigid and seizing up. The discussions that oil the wheels of social structure take place on all sorts of occasions from the meetings that attend most social groups, to the myriad private conversations behind the scenes, to neighbourly gossip. When I was a *banjar* member in Pisangkaja in 1970-72, argument in assembly meetings was par for the course and outside was semi-incessant. It is hard, if you reside for a long time in a Balinese village, not to be struck by the fact that life consists of conversations and arguments more or less round the clock.

Being often humble and transient, this rich and tumultuous dialogue passes unnoticed by those in power and those who write about them. One evening during a discussion among several villagers, the topic arose as to why the lives of ordinary or poor people were so rarely shown on television. The response of a distinguished local actor and intellectual of some standing bears quoting.

As for the poor, they are of no use. The rich never think of actually talking with the poor. If possible, they keep as far away from them as they can, where the rich can talk among themselves about whatever. I don't think that the poor could succeed in speaking. Even if they did, as was said earlier, they are worth nothing, no one is listening. (The key sentence in Balinese was: '*Sang Tiwas 'ten ja wènten nyidang ngaraos napi-napi, yèn tiang ngamanahin'*.)

This sentiment, widely muttered in the 1990s, was famously, if silently, flaunted on the mudguards of trucks: *Koh Ngomong* (what is the point of speaking?). In a recent article, Richard Fox has provided an intriguing analysis of two sets of conversations between village women that exemplify just how fluid and nuanced such unappreciated dialogues are (2017).

Bali however presents dialogue with a limiting condition. Few societies are as unashamedly hierarchical as Bali, especially in the south of the island with its great courts. No two people are equal. Be-

sides caste (or its residue), gender differences and birth order ensure comprehensive ranking: even twins are graded by who was born first. Furthermore, vast differences in power and wealth ensure that privilege is widely exercised – with due deference and subservience taken for granted. As the actor noted, the poor are treated with disdain, if they are even noticed; just as juniors are expected to be quiet and obey. As the lineaments of Balinese society past and present militate against dialogue, is it just an unrealizable dream? However, ‘any structural system is limited... it is always surrounded by an “excess of meaning” which it is unable to master’ (Laclau 1990: 90). Practice tends to defy the rules in various ways. ‘Weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985), like conformity and hyper-obedience (Heryanto



Photo 5. ‘Capitalism re-invents Balinese culture. The Lègong costume is wrong, as is the dancer’s expression’

1999), are strategies of resisting or even obliterating power, pomp and self-importance. And anyone who has lived for a long time in Balinese village families, hung around in markets or sat chatting in *warung* knows how lively discussion is even if, like water, it must at times flow round obdurate obstacles like age and masculine self-importance. Although men often dismiss it as mere gossip, when the former are not around, women can get on with the business of keeping the world ticking over. Whether Bali is an elegant monologic tableau or a raucous – or lambent – dialogue depends on the circumstances. As Worsley pointed out (1984), Kamasan painters have depicted the two worlds – identified there with aristocratic manners and popular bustling activity (*ramé*) – as coexisting and complementary.

Circumlocution or flowery language replete with symbols and complex allusions of the kind much used by the old Balinese aristocracy and new élite should not be confused with rhetoric. The latter

is an essentially republican art: one must be accustomed to tolerating the most unusual opinions and points of view and even to taking a certain pleasure in their counterplay; one must be just as willing to listen as to speak; and as a listener one must be able more or less to appreciate the art being applied (Nietzsche 1989a: 3).

Indonesia on this account might be a republic: Bali would seem to struggle to be.

The Balinese acceptance of hierarchy is reinforced by a penchant for inferring profound truths from folk etymologies which, while clever and amusing, without detailed historical literary sources are purely speculative.

What is truth? a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions, worn-out

metaphors without sensory impact, coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal, and no longer as coins (Nietzsche 1989b: 250).

Extracting irrefutable truths from language in such a despotic ‘régime of signs’ is an exercise in ‘infinitely circular’ argument (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 113), which relies on interpretive priests as bureaucrats (1988: 114) – a depiction that fits Bali like a glove. No matter how elegant the etymologizing or imaginative inventing of history, it cannot disguise from a critical observer that the coinage is base metal.

Have things not changed though, now that Balinese use social media so much?<sup>1</sup> The question reveals the difference between disagreement and argumentation. As McLuhan noted, the medium significantly affects what you can say (1964). Social media are ideal for expressing instant opinions and venting feelings with scant control and few sanctions. They are ill-designed for deliberation, justification or forensic analysis, which is then open to reflective counter-argument. Social media encourage the appearance of argument with little or none of the substance.

### **Argument without Words**

Argument, in English at least, suggests verbal expatiation. However, argument, in the sense I have used here, depends on how it is appreciated by spectators. Maurice Bloch maintained that ‘you cannot argue with a song’ (1974: 71). You most certainly can. There is no reason in principle why you cannot argue in, or through, the medium of paintings or even music. Worsley has shown that Kamasan-style paintings may not just tell a story with a moral. How they portray characters, how the scenes are juxtaposed, the slant they give to relationships and so on, all express argument. Furthermore, this argument is not just logical. An analysis of one version of the Brayut story showed that ‘scenes were arranged to

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1 My thanks to Nyoman Wijaya for drawing my attention to the role of social media in contemporary Balinese styles of engagement.

draw the attention of viewers to the logical, ethical and emotional validity of generally shared beliefs and values alluded to in the painting' (2017: 4). Philosophers who focus on propositional logic miss the complexity of social argument.

A confrontation worth mentioning took place in Pisangkaja during the Japanese occupation that was still talked about thirty years later (Hobart 2015: 23-24). A villager, irked by the monopoly on certain rationed goods, notably cotton cloth, exercised by the local court (*puri*) and the compliant *banjar* head, obtained through a friend a permit for fifteen metres in lengths of red, white and blue. At midday when the village square was crowded, he marched in silently trailing the cloth behind him, went to a *warung* and leisurely drank a coffee. The act was a catalytic moment in villagers' resentment against perceived inequitable treatment by the high castes. At *banjar* elections shortly afterwards, for the first time, the court's candidate lost to a popular local and in fact never again attained any political office. A wordless argument was singularly successful.

### Some Dangers of Dogma

Every society, as Foucault noted, has cultural formulations that are 'said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again'. In Bali these are often identified as to do with religion and custom, although neither term translates comfortably in Balinese (*agama* or *adat*, see Picard 2011: 485). While such articulations are crucial to a society's members' ability to reflect on themselves, on what they value and how to approach change, if this conversation turns into a monologue, it inevitably leads to anachronism, closure, stagnation and ideological involution. Perhaps because the sheer pace and violence of change has proven unsettling, Balinese have a predilection for invoking dubious logic and imposing formulaic articulations, often of questionable provenance, on highly complex and fluid situations.

An example of the former is a frequently-reiterated false syllogism of asserting the consequent. One version runs something like: 'Bali's culture is unique. Many tourists visit Bali. That

proves Bali's culture is unique (why else would they come?)'. The conclusion does not follow from the initial premise. There are many reasons that tourists visit Bali. Even if at some point during their stay tourists visit some cultural sites, it does not follow that this was their main, let alone sole, reason for travelling. (For package tours, visiting selected sites is built-in and not optional.) Nor does it explain what they were doing for the rest of their stay – i.e. most of their time. Statistical data are skewed by the prior choice of criteria, as are questionnaires. Asked why they chose Bali, few are likely to reply nightclubbing, drink and sex. Ideology's capacity to ignore logic and actuality is virtually limitless.

The second point requires more elucidation, as an example shows. One triad, *Tri Hita Karana*, is widely invoked. It is variously glossed, but broadly connotes the harmonious relationship between the spiritual, social and natural worlds. Its relevance has expanded to explain how the Balinese landscape was shaped 'since at least the 12<sup>th</sup>. Century' (UNESCO 2011: 4) as well as the foundation of village customs. Circularly, *Tri Hita Karana* emerges as both an ideology and the analytical concept supposed to explain it. It is 'a representative ecosophy' concerned with preserving and protecting the environment, in terms of religious, social and natural environment (Astawa *et al.* 2018: 47). But it also transforms into an evaluative yardstick against which to determine whether the actual practice of local law fits its 'underlying ecosophy', which has now attained the status of a monologic absolute standard. Elsewhere, without any sense of contradiction, we are told that it 'is an element of Balinese culture that was inherited from generation to generation' but simultaneously was recently adopted 'in order to enrich the Balinese culture by adding some concepts taken from Hinduism' (Sukarma 2016: 86). What on earth is going on?

A clue lies in appreciating that *Tri Hita Karana* is a modern ideological construct, coined in November 1966 by Colonel I Mertha Sutedja (who went on to be Director of ASTI) at a conference aimed at meshing Balinese culture with state ideology (Sudira 2011). We are faced with an extraordinary anachronistic retrojection of an

explicitly political ideological contrivance vested with the trappings of antiquity, omnipresence, pervasiveness, inviolate sanctity and unquestionable authenticity. It is a fine example of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). It does not follow though that Balinese had no sense of the complexity of relationships between the non-manifest world, humans and the environment was not appreciated beforehand, but certainly not in its present form.

My concern here though is different. What dangers arise from overriding dialogic argument with monologic dogma? Does insisting Balinese *subak* exemplify *Tri Hita Karana* produce the harmonious whole celebrated by Lansing, UNESCO, the Balinese government and sundry scholars (Windia 2006)? We might bear in mind that harmony, a classical Greek Pythagorean mathematical concept, is hardly indigenous. Graeme MacRae warned of the risks of applying top-down models to Balinese *subak*.

Knowledge production for heritage should first and foremost be arranged around the solving of complex human affairs, the multidimensional issues that require intersecting approaches capable of engaging with the mutual entanglement of problem domains and their implications (2017: 848; citing Tribe 1997: 398).

He noted that

the ways the development industry, and bureaucratic institutions in general, construct ‘documentary realities’...tend to overshadow local experience of everyday reality in institutional policy and practice. The World Heritage framework, nominations, processes, governmental decrees and agreements mentioned here constitute such a documentary reality which lies behind and drives the entire process. But, as we have seen above, it actually plays surprising little part in their working out on the ground. To local farmers and communities, this documentary reality is virtually invisible and certainly incomprehensible (2017: 855).

It would seem this grand framework does not work in practice as its proponents like to imagine.

What has *Tri Hita Karana* (*THK*) to do with this though? Reiterating the familiar threat that Bali will become dominated by cultures from outside, some scholars have questioned

the need for a *THK*-based *keajegan subak* (*subak* firmness). Such approaches are full of contradictions: they stress the many threats to the *subak* as a ‘traditional’ institution and guardian of Balinese culture, but locate the solution in the *subak* as the *THK*-based source of stability, sustainability and environmental wisdom... Thus, *THK* has become the default mode in Balinese-authored work on the *subak*. Such literature strikingly confuses the world of ideals and ideology of *THK* in cultural or environmental protection with real-life practices... Like the village, the *subak* domain has become a new arena for local political contestation, and *THK* a weapon in the struggle (Roth & Sedana 2015: 164, 166).

This is not just a matter of government politics and administration.

The ideological turn towards *THK* in the (especially Balinese-authored) scientific literature on irrigated agriculture and the *subak*, and its framing in terms of shared and uncontested tradition, culture and local knowledge, hamper such critical analysis. While earlier Balinese-authored work has made a significant contribution to studies of the *subak*, the current centrality of *THK* ideology leads to analytical closure... Whether *THK* is a ‘real’ or an ‘invented’ tradition is, in itself, not important. What matters is how it is used to give meaning to wider social and political processes, for what purposes and with what consequences. Framings of *THK* as culture, tradition or local knowledge are not simple ‘truths’ but part of specific knowledge-power regimes that establish and naturalise specific forms of social ordering. *THK* politicises the *subak* domain in specific ways by linking it to processes of local governance, intervention and juridification, but depoliticises other basically political issues of control over resources like land and water (Roth & Sedana 2015: 169-70).

Academics risk being complicit by conflating dogma with scholarship and becoming part of a régime of power/knowledge which their task is to analyze critically not to replicate unthinkingly.

## Questions

This discussion raises a host of questions. The problems hidden and exacerbated by blanket formulae like *Tri Hita Karana* occur very widely. Examples of supposedly ancient doctrines that spring to mind include *Désa Kala Patra*, *Puja Tri Sandhyā*, *Tri Ananta Bakti*, *Sad Ripu*, *Rwa Bhineda*, *Tat Twam Asi*, *Catur Guru*, *Catur Paramita*, *Catur Prawerti*, *Catur Dana*, *Asta Brata*, *Catur Marga* and *Tri Manggalaning Yadnya*. How many, like *Tri Hita Karana*, are newly reinvented and retrojected to give the semblance of an ancient, continuous, yet instantly accessible heritage? How many such idioms commit the classical logical ‘genetic fallacy’ of assuming that ideas from the distant past or distant places (often drawing on Indian literature or scripture two thousand years ago) have a transcendental essence that applies unproblematically in entirely different epistemological and cultural contexts under vastly different social and political conditions?

Analytically what is at issue? These formulae are ideological and indeed were designed to integrate Bali into the New Order’s vision of Pancasila ideology. Several questions arise. Is their habituation to hierarchy sufficient reason to explain Balinese accepting their status as docile bodies and governed souls? What impels Balinese to embrace this hegemony so enthusiastically and uncritically? Do most have much choice? When elsewhere modernity usually involves challenging received ideology, why should the reverse happen in Bali? Balinese society has been rudely catapulted from a highly traditional society based on tight corporate groups and networks of patronage into a world of chaotic consumer capitalism, where old bonds have weakened and new social institutions are largely absent. So, it is easy to appreciate the impulse to articulate people’s experience and organize them through ideological formulae.

What social institutions then underwrite ideology? Althusser identified several ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ (1984: 151). For present purposes two are particularly relevant: religion and the media. It seems that the role of formulating religious ideology falls largely to the Parisada Hindu Dharma; while a key mass media

producer is the Bali Post Group. It would be interesting therefore to consider how far these – and, indeed, other such – institutions permit open discussion and encourage argument about the applicability and the potential problems of their ideological tenets. To the extent that they do not, they replace dialogue with monologue.

A further question arises: who reiterates or exemplifies this ideology in Bali, in what capacity, on what occasions for what purposes? Is it, in Gramsci's terms, 'traditional intellectuals' such as priests? Or is it figures legitimated by modern institutions? At whom are ideological claims aimed, with what consequences, and how effective are they, on what occasions? It is one thing to make blanket assertions about the workings of hegemony, it is quite another to establish how, or to what degree, they work, on whom, when.

We need further to ask: what aspect of ideology are we dealing with? It is with what Althusser called an Imaginary (1984; Hobart 2017), which envisages a stable, coherent, desirable, intelligible, manageable world with a place for everyone. To return to my two opening paragraphs, we can now give a provisional answer to the problem of the two Balis. The former is an Imaginary. The latter is the mundane actuality of Bali. The relationship between the two is complex, but would seem that the more anomic that social institutions become and the more dystopic most people's lived reality, the more fervently its proponents advocate instantiating the Imaginary in the – rather forlorn – hope that it will ameliorate the actuality. If the example of *Tri Hita Karana* is anything to go by, it may well exacerbate problems by denying their existence.

The notion of Imaginaries certainly encapsulates the world vision embraced by ideas like *Tri Hita Karana*. What are the potential problems? Althusser argued that 'what is represented in ideology is ... not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live' (1984: 155). This formulation sounds complicated until we think of the telling criticisms raised in applying supposedly ancient concepts to *subak* organization.

The real conditions and real relations of farmers are neatly hidden from view. So, what bureaucrats and visitors see is a set of neatly engineered and beautiful imaginary relations that celebrate invented tradition at its finest. Meanwhile the monologue so created suppresses and silences not only the farmers' counter-arguments, but even the possibility of their being heard! Such imaginaries are dangerous, because they mislead and effectively anaesthetize both decision-makers and the populace at large from recognizing, let alone being free to talk about, very real problems of which in Bali there are many. If they want their island to have a future that is not at the mercy and whim of foreign capital, is it time Balinese thought finally of laying aside imaginaries and engaging in genuine dialogue and argument?

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